

ANTELOPE RANGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

I. THE STUDY AREA - 87,400 acres

The Antelope Range WSA (NV-060-231/241) is located in northeastern Nye County, Nevada approximately 40 miles south of Eureka. The WSA includes 87,400 acres of public lands.

The WSA is bounded on the northwest by the Little Fish Lake Valley road. A fenceline designates the western boundary through township twelve north. The southwest boundary is generally the 7200' contour line. The southern boundary generally follows the Big Cow Canyon road to the east until it meets with Luther Waddles Wash then follows the wash to the road from Eureka to Moores Station. The boundary follows this road north. The north boundary follows land net lines.

The Antelope Range WSA lies in the southern part of the Antelope Range and the northern end of the Hot Creek Range. The WSA consists of a ridgeline, approximately twenty-five miles long and eight miles wide with an average elevation differential of about two thousand feet. Pinyon pine and juniper cover most of the WSA with scattered areas of aspen and mahogany.

The National Forest And Public Lands of Nevada Enhancement Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-550) transferred administrative jurisdiction of 43,700 acres in the WSA to the Toiyabe National Forest leaving 43,700 acres under BLM management. The Act, while transferring administrative jurisdiction, left unchanged the wilderness review initiated by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The wilderness recommendation will be developed by the BLM and submitted to the Secretary of Interior, President and Congress for their consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 80,320 acres recommended for wilderness **7,580 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation of this WSA is to designate 80,320 acres as wilderness and release 7,580 acres for uses other than wilderness. All wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long-term. The partial wilderness alternative, the recommendation of this report, would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Due to the U.S. Geological Service and U.S. Bureau of Mines report identifying areas with higher potential for minerals than those recognized in the DEIS, the area recommended for designation has been reduced by 2,780 acres. The 80,320 acre recommended for designation include a total of 79,820 acres of public land within the Antelope Range WSA and an additional 500 acres of public land adjacent to the northern boundary of the WSA, but not part of the WSA. The addition of this 500 acres will enhance the manageability of the area by making the boundary easier to identify on the ground.

The majority of the Antelope Range WSA is recommended for wilderness because it is a large area in exceptionally pristine condition, with high meadows, rugged topography and scenic beauty, historic and archaeological values, a lack of conflicting resource uses and strong public support for designation.

The WSA is a remote, relatively unknown mountain range 25 miles long and eight miles wide with an abrupt elevation change of 2,000 feet. The core of this mountainous unit has not been penetrated by roads or other evidence of human use. The area's rugged character and apparent lack of mineral potential have helped to preserve the majority of this unit in a natural condition. A number of spring fed meadows occur in the southern part of the WSA. Some of these meadows have been inaccessible to livestock and vehicles and offer a rare

opportunity for study of the natural environment. These meadows, with their rich flora, fauna and water sources, are highly desirable destinations for hikers, backpackers and photographers. Abrupt volcanic cliffs, rock outcrops and deep narrow canyons contribute to the area's outstanding opportunities for solitude and unconfined primitive recreation opportunities. The visual interest of the area is enhanced by occasional eroded outcrops of white silicic ash flow tuff, and patches of aspen, that contrast dramatically with the darker volcanic rocks and juniper-pinyon woodlands that predominate the landscape.

The visitors can easily be carried back into the past when they may come upon a group of Shoshone Indian wickiups or any of the many archaeological site that exist in this WSA, or perhaps the James Wild Horse Trap - rows of pinyon and juniper piled together to form barriers for horses - believed to have been used by Will James (listed on the National Register of Historic Places).

The Antelope Range WSA has received nearly unanimous support for designation. It has high wilderness values, few conflicts, and can easily be managed as wilderness because of the rugged terrain, remoteness, and no private inholdings or known mineral resources.

Conflicts with other resource uses of this WSA are low. Mineral and energy potential are low because of the dense volcanic rock which overlies the majority of the WSA. The extreme southern tip of the WSA has outcrops of Mesozoic-Paleozoic sedimentary rocks which may indicate host rocks for precious metals. Development for minerals or energy is not expected within the part of the WSA recommended for wilderness.

The 7,580 acres not recommended for wilderness lack the quality of wilderness values of naturalness and solitude found in the rest of the WSA. An unnatural crested wheat seeding is located in this area along with two fences, three ways, and five cherrystemmed roads. High mineral potential for silver, zinc, vanadium and other metallics occurs on 2,780 acres.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The area is generally free from human imprints and is in a natural state. The WSA consists of a ridgeline, approximately twenty-five miles long and eight miles wide with an average elevation differential of about two thousand feet. Pinyon pine and juniper cover most of the WSA with scattered areas of aspen and mahogany. The following imprints are found within the boundary of the wilderness study area: 13 ways, 5 water developments, a small seeding in the northeast portion of the unit near Crested Wheat Ridge, 4 fences which protrude a short way into the unit, and a small exclosure in the southeast portion of the unit.

B. Solitude: The unit contains outstanding opportunities for solitude. Located 20 miles from the nearest paved highway, the area is extremely remote and seldom visited. A mixture of diverse topography and vegetation combine to form excellent screening in the unit. In addition, size and topography combine to form almost unlimited secluded spots. The interior of the unit provides seclusion to almost any degree.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The area offers abundant opportunities for sustained high-elevation hiking and horseback riding, hunting, sightseeing, photography, and historical and archaeological study. These factors, in combination, provide an outstanding opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation within the wilderness study area.

D. Special Features: The special features include the untrampled spring fed meadows that are very uncommon in Nevada and the James Wild Horse Trap (listed on the National Register of Historic Places). This trap consists of rows of pinyon and juniper piled together to form barriers for horses.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The portion of this WSA recommended for wilderness designation can reasonably be managed as wilderness over the long term. There are no private inholdings or state lands within the unit. The oil and gas leases along the western portion of the unit should not pose a major manageability problem. No rights-of-way are proposed within or near the area. Continued livestock grazing would not be incompatible with wilderness management. Boundaries are generally easily recognizable and offer no problems for wilderness management. An exception is an 2.5-mile portion of the northern boundary which follows a section line. Manageability could be improved by moving the boundary north to coincide with terrain features identifiable on the ground. This boundary revision would encompass an additional 500 acres.

Not recommended part of the WSA for wilderness would improve manageability of the area which is recommended by removing a number of imprints, including ways and cherrystemmed roads, where vehicle use would be a problem for manageability. Other existing ways are not considered a major problem for manageability.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Originally the Antelope Range WSA was evaluated as having a low potential for all forms of energy and mineral resources. There were no mining claims, however, oil and gas leases along the western portion of the WSA do exist.

The United States Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment of the Antelope WSA in 1984 and 1985 (U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1731-E). This report indicates that no identified mineral or energy resources occur within the study area. The southern part of the area has a moderate mineral resource potential for undiscovered gold and silver. One small area (woodruff formation) in the southern part has a high resource potential for undiscovered vanadium, zinc, selenium, molybdenum, and silver. The remainder of the study area has low resource potential for undiscovered gold, silver, lead, zinc, manganese, tin, and molybdenum. The study area also has low resource potential for undiscovered oil and gas resources.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. During the formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 15 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Seven individuals and five environmental organizations favored the Antelope Range designation and one individual, one mining company and one mining organization opposed this designation.

Reasons for supporting designation were; outstanding wilderness values, high mountain meadows which have not received substantial grazing, very large, wild, remote, important cultural resources, low mineral potential, no private inholdings. Reasons for supporting nondesignation were; too many man-made improvements, suitable recommendation would preclude future development of mineral potential.

The State of Nevada in its consistency review concurred with the Preferred Alternative.